

## War Economy of Ethno-Religious Crises: a Study of the Wukari Crises of Taraba State, Nigeria.

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**Manuscript ID: RCMSS/IJPCS/14002**

### Abstract

No protracted violent struggle can survive without a war economy that pays for its existential needs and costly expenses. Therefore, conflict resolutions and management experts and other stakeholders must consider the sources that are providing the funds for vicious conflicts. It has been acknowledged that the dislodgment of the war economy of any conflict helps to suffocate its progress severally. This study looked at a protracted ethno-religious crisis' war economy critically, using field research methodologies. The study identified all the major sources of the war economy of the crisis and recommended among others that the sources of the war economy must be dislocated holistically immediately so that the re-occurring Wukari ethno-religious crisis will be halted to a great degree.

**Key words-** War, Economy, Ethno-Religious, Wukari, Taraba and Nigeria

### Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of wars have been fought since remembered times, this battles were fought with the help of a very active economy which produced the necessary funds to prosecute them. In some cases, warring factions pre-planned openly the modalities the war will be financed before the conflict starts in full force, while others surreptitiously work-out the modalities of financing the war in the midst of the war. The study of how economic activities actively or indirectly affect conflict dynamisms in all ramifications is attracting some considered attentions globally since the end of the *proxy wars*, the wars fought for and sponsored by the then ideologically laden and opposed bi-polar super powers in Africa (Kiristi,2002:7). The million dollars study sponsored by the Post-Conflict Unit of the World Bank entitled, *The Economics of Civil Wars, Crime and Violence*, is a good example (Kiristi 2002:2, Naidoo, 2003:6). The World Bank study alone has influenced numerous other studies and criticisms across the world.

The key issue to be addressed in this study is how protracted ethno-religious wars in the developing world are financed. Therefore, the war economies of wars that are induced by ethnicity and religious differences are the focus. And the protracted ethno-religious conflict of Wukari in Taraba State of Nigeria, which is actually a war by the number of people killed according to the definition of Correlates of War (COW) Project by Small and David (1998), is the focus of this study. The COW Project define war as any *sustained combat, involving organized forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related fatalities*. The Wukari Crisis was chosen because despite its protracted nature and the high number of casualties that has been involved, the organization and the weapons/ammunitions used in the conflict have been complex and enormous too.



### **Objectives**

Ethno-religious crises in Nigeria have attracted the attentions of academics, however, it appears most of these studies did not cover the war economies of these crises in depth, consequently, the main two motivating factors of this study were, one: to comprehensively find out the sources that are producing the funding (the war economies) of the Wukari ethno-religious conflict for both sides of the divide. Secondly, to recommend strategies to disable or co-opt these sources of finance that is helping to make the conflict a protracted one.

### **Methodology**

Because of the complexities that a study of this nature usually attracts, especially the security implications, qualitative field research methodology was employed, and therefore, unstructured interviews were the main instruments of data collection. However, as a way of triangulation for extensive data gathering and validation, some well-informed target population of the study was given questionnaires to fill. Heads of religious groups in Wukari, traditional heads such as chiefs, youth leaders, women leaders, politicians, civil servants, academics, opinion leaders, heads of traders' associations of Wukari, members of the security forces and government officials were the key sources of data used for the study.

### **Dissection of Variables**

#### *The Concept of War Economy*

Immediately before or after when a war broke out, warring parties usually face a real dilemma, the quandary of building a material base or bases to finance the war (Jurgen, 2003:126). It is this challenge that typically drive the warring parties to develop a conflict economy that basically depend on the use of brute force and the other social structures that were in themselves the by-products of an ongoing war (Jurgen, 2003:167).

War economy, as a sub-sector of conflict study has less controversies in terms of definition, there was only a shift and an inclusion in the definition. War economy has been used as a description of the post-World War Two Western economies that have been built on massive and thriving defense industries justified by the Cold War according to Atkinson (1997:6). However, at present Atkinson posit that, war economy is increasingly used to refer to the exploitative reliance of warring factions on the economic production of territories they control. In the absence of funding from superpower countries of the global South, modern rebel groups are compelled to seek economic support directly from the populations they control, usually by coercive or other military means (Atkinson, 1997:6). To Jurgen (2003:135) the term war economies refers to economic strategies applied by irregular military forces such as guerrillas or party militias. These economic strategies are only likely to evolve under the circumstances of war. It is the decay of states and their respective governmental structures, as well as the dissolution of the state monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force, that formed the essential preconditions for the evolution of such war economies.

According to Fekete (2004), war economy refers to a set of economic structures that arise from armed conflicts and that may continue to exist even after the violence has ended. A war economy has to do with making money out of a war system rather than out of a peaceful situation. Naidoo, (2000:8) conceptualized that the term war economy, in its common usage,



has been used to mean how warring factions and other stakeholders sustain an intractable conflict through the expropriation and exploitation of a country's resources.

War economy involves all the direct and indirect activities those who are in a war engage in to raise money internally or get liquid cash from outside to prosecute the war; the major driving force that underscores the development of war economies is war financing.

The following are the means both the main factions and even the government forces of the about two decade's old Lebanon war used to raise cash to prosecute the war that made it protracted unnecessarily according to Jurgen, 2003:125-132):

- Foreign governments support;
- Contribution from Lebanese diasporas;
- Pillaging, confiscation of private property and theft (especially bank robbery);
- Cultivation, processing and selling of drugs to internal consumers;
- Drug trafficking;
- Protection fees;
- Drug taxes from cultivators who are not militia members;
- Taxes from importers and exporters of goods and services in territories controlled by warring factions

The above elements of the war economy of the Lebanon war is a bit markedly different from the elements of the war economies of the African protracted wars such as the Angola, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Niger Delta crisis of Nigeria. Virtually, all warring factions in Africa mostly depend on illegal extraction of natural resources in their domains. For instance, the Liberia and the Sierra-Leon warlords got cash to finance their wars from the extraction and sell of natural resources—timber, rubber, diamond, and gold (Atkinson, 1997:6).

In the Niger Delta of Nigeria, according to Ikeleghe (2005) in his study, *the Economy of Conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria*, the main sources of the war economy of the region's war were and are still, illegal bunkering of crude oil, kidnapping for ransom, and local refining and sale of crude oil products among others.

#### *Ethno-religious Crises*

At present no type of natural resource or primordial cleavages that do not cause crisis in Africa. Land, water, forest, religion, ethnicity, power sharing deals in governments, revenue sharing formula, where a local government headquarters will be sited, universities admissions spaces' allocations, etc; all actively cause conflicts in the continent. In Nigeria, ethno-religious crises have become a part of the national history. The above explains why ethno-religious crises have attracted scholars' interrogations profoundly. Tijjani Ahmed Mohammed, Mohd Nasir Omar, and Ibrahim Abu Bakar in their study, *Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Revisited*, appraised the potentials of using religions to resolve ethno-religious crises vis-à-vis an instrument of justice, development, harmony and peace. Salawu, (2010) in his work, *Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies*, proffered management strategies to the ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria after casually touching on the causes of ethno-religious crises. Major ethno-religious crises like the Jos, Plateau State crisis has also attracted a lot of deep analyses. Philip Ostien's (2009) *Jonah Jang*



and the *Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria*, intensely dissected the ethno-religious crisis in Jos and proffered workable solutions. The intricacies of the legal aspect of Nigeria's ethno-religious crises have been adequately covered by Nnamdi Aduba, of the Institute of Advanced legal Studies, Abuja, in his study, *Ethno-religious Crisis: Legal Perspective*. Aaron Sayne's (2012) *Rethinking Nigeria's Indigene-Settler Conflicts*; Fawole and Bello's (2011), *The impact of ethno-religious conflict on Nigerian federalism*; Samuel Egwu's (2013) *Ethno-religious crisis and national security*; Y. L. Gambo's (2011) *Ethno Religious Conflict and Settlement Pattern in Northern Nigeria* and Chris Kwaja's (2011) *Nigeria's Pernicious Drivers of Ethno-Religious Conflict*, are some of the most recent and seminal works that have extraneously x-rayed the ethnic-religious conflict dynamics in the present civilian dispensations.

Ethno-religious conflict is a state of affairs in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. Ethno-religious conflicts are notable from other types of social conflicts in the dimension that it involves ethnic groups, which are of different religions (Salawu, 2010:5) Like Okey Okechekwu asserted, in his article in the leading Nigerian newspaper, *Thisday*, of January 7<sup>th</sup> 2014, ethnicity *per-se* like religion or any other natural difference does not on its own cause conflict. It is rather religious or ethnic chauvinism as against what he called ethnic awareness and ethnicity that causes conflict. To Okey:

The first of these concepts is 'ethnic awareness'. The second is ethnocentrism, while the third is 'ethnic chauvinism'. Ethnic awareness is simply your knowledge of the fact that you are from a particular ethnic group. Ethnocentrism refers to a conspicuous love of all things pertaining to one's ethnic roots, as well as attachment to same without disturbing others about their own preferences. Ethnic chauvinism, on the other hand, revolves around the use of position, force or influence to drive only the economic and other interests of a particular ethnic group (Okey, 2014:1).

In extension therefore, it is ethno-religious chauvinism or extremisms that is now one of the leading real causes of the present ethnic and religious crises among others in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular and not the raw entities—religion and ethnicity (Chris, 2011:5). Usually what starts as an ethnic conflict may end up as a religious crisis and vice-versa, this help to a large extent to explain why ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and indeed Africa are always overwhelming in their effects (Salawu, 2010:4).

#### *Wukari Crisis*

Wukari is largely a cosmopolitan and multi-religious town with a large chunk of all the good, the bad and the ugly attractions that can be situated in most African cities. The community is located in the north central state of Taraba (Ukaogo and Adihikon, 2012:43). Wukari town is by and large accepted by the Jukun tribe as their *de-facto* traditional capital (Ukaogo and Adihikon, 2012:43). Wukari is the headquarters of the Wukari Local Government (administrative council) Area; the town is situated in the southern part of Taraba State. As a result of its cosmopolitan cum large population density, which is one of the causes of the identity crisis bedeviling the community, it has some modern facilities and infrastructure that are uncommon in most towns and cities in Nigeria. Two universities—a private and a federal government's—are located in



the community. Abimbola and Akin (2009:153) in their study, *Indigenship and citizenship in Nigeria: myth or reality*, exposed that, the Jukun people (one of the major tribes in Taraba State) had firmly established themselves in Wukari as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Wukari was a principal town in the ancient Kwararafa or kororofa confederacy and the Jukuns, as Emma-Lawson (2012:215) in his study averred: *seemed to have maintained their political preponderance in the confederacy from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century until its demise*. Madu and Goni, (2013: 152) classified the Wukari crises in the table provided in their study, *ethno-religious conflict in Taraba State and its implications for socio-economic, political and educational development of youths*, as both ethnic and religious. The protracted fissiparous natures of the Wukari crises were also revealed. Of the fourteen main ethno-religious crises that have erupted in the state from 1991 to July 13<sup>th</sup> 2013, the venue of three of them with multiple reoccurrences and with equally costly consequences was in Wukari (Madu and Goni, 2013: 152). Itodo Daniel of the most widely read newspaper in the northern part of Nigeria, *The Weekly Trust*, aptly informed the world about the lingering Wukari conflict thus:

Violence at Wukari has become a recurrent decimal that need to be addressed squarely by all concerned stakeholders in the interest of peace, unity and development of the area. The recent crisis came up barely two months after an earlier one which also witnessed loss of many lives and property worth millions of naira that were destroyed. On February 23, 2013, a mere disagreement among youths on a football pitch triggered one of them to kill his mate and not long after, the whole town was on fire with unimaginable level of destructions. On July 13, 2010, the town also witnessed a minor crisis over an attempt to erect a worship place at the Police Area Command. Records also showed that in 1990, a political crisis was experienced in Wukari over the alleged killing of a youth in the area. There were also reported incidents of crises between the Tivs and Jukuns at other occasions (Weekly Trust, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

Thousands of people have been killed and properties worth millions of dollars have been lost by both sides of the warring factions in the conflict. According to Wole Ayodele of *Thisday* newspaper of May 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 that: *no fewer than hundred people were feared killed and several others injured in the violent clash that occurred on Friday in the ancient city of Wukari in Taraba State between the aborigines and Hausa youths in the community*. As indicated earlier, the conflicts in Wukari that have become perennial and exceptionally vicious in recent times have two dimensions—religious and ethnic. One side of the warring faction is fundamentally made up of the largely Christian and animist Jukun aborigines of Wukari, who are the key visible inheritors of the far defunct Kwararafa or Kororofa Confederacy while the other party of the conflicts is to a considerable extent made up of Jukuns (who are also indigenes of Wukari) but who are Muslims with mostly Hausa/Fulani dwellers of the community, which most of the Christian and animist Jukuns of Wukari dubbed *settlers or non-indigenes*.

### Findings

The following are the major channels and strategies (elements of the war economy) through which the warring factions in the ethno-religious crisis in Wukari are mobilizing and getting funds:



- a) *Contributions and supports from political elites*- political elites are the major means of funds for both sides of the warring factions, these groups of war *entrepreneurs* provide raw cash for both sides to mainly establish their hegemony and protect their political and economic interests. Some of the political elites also provide funds because they want to advance their political careers;
- b) *Contributions and supports from the Diaspora*- warring factions also get funds from members of their respective ethnic or religious groups' who are living outside the country. Most members of the Diaspora Community release funds to the warring factions because they want to help their people to survive. Some also do because of the strong appeals they get from the heads of their home/local ethnic or religious communities.
- c) *Extortions*- well-to-do individuals and owners of both small and medium sizes businesses in the jurisdictions of the warring factions are usually forced to pay some money which goes into the war expenses. Usually, mobilizers of funds through this channel tag the extortion, "development level."
- d) *Contributions from civil servants*- government workers, particularly the echelon of the state and the federal civil services are major source of fund. Like the political elites, this group of war financiers also has divergent motives. Some usually provide the fund because they want to have supports from their communities when they have any problem in their places of work.
- e) *Booties from previous crises*- anytime there is a crisis, looting of business and other lucrative targets is a norm now in Nigeria, and in ethno-religious crises these lootings are well organized because the proceeds of the lootings are use to finance the next crisis. Even when the looting was not organized, individual fighters are aware that part of the loots and the booties of a particular crisis must be kept to finance the subsequent ones;
- f) *Profits from community owned investments*- like in most communities all over the world, there are community owned small businesses that are control by some groups. Profits from these businesses are a veritable means and channels of the war economies of these communities and groups. For instances, in Wukari, proceeds from borehole water selling outlets that are owned by both factions provide funds for the procurement of various war materials and services;
- g) *Internal fund raising activities*- individual groups usually task themselves to raise funds to prosecute a war. In most cases, this is the first strategy of raising fund to mobilize resources for a conflict. The members of both factions who live in Abuja, Lagos, Port-Harcourt and other cities are the main contributors to internal war-related fund raising mechanisms; and
- h) *Institutional supports and contributions*- institutions like the local government council usually also provide fund for a favoured faction in the conflict. In most cases this is done unilaterally by the head of the local government and these funds are provided under a cover to the faction that appears to be plausible.

### Conclusion

No conflict occurs, exist or get prolonged without a fissiparous and active economy sustaining it. And therefore, crises managers and conflict resolution practitioners cannot exclude the



economy of any conflict in their attempt to manage or resolve a conflict. Consequently, for ethno-religious crises such as the Wukari one, the channels/elements of the conflict or the war economy must be disabled and where this is impossible, that or those channels that cannot be disabled must be incorporated to the peace economy during the resolution processes. This means that, the political elites, the civil service elites and the Diaspora Communities of both factions should be included in the conflict resolution/management committee set up by the federal, the state and the local government council. Secondly, the general movements of huge sums of money to and from the community needed to be comprehensively monitored. Thirdly, the proceeds of community-based investments should be monitored by the authorities concerned; it will be part of a very visible early warning signal if large sums of monies are suddenly withdrawn by one of or all of the warring factions within a short period. In addition, all direct or indirect fund raising activities in the community and its environs, more especially the ones in the religious houses should be adequately monitored. Finally, known ethnic and religious fundamentalists should be banned from becoming the head of the Wukari Local Government Council. These measures will help not only to reduce the frequencies of the conflict; it will prevent the growth of *warlordism* and the development of very lucrative and constant elements war economies in the community like the ones in the Niger Delta region. If *warlordism* and very lucrative but stable war economies develop in Wukari, the conflicts will not only be frequent, the rate of destruction will be massive and the management of the war lords and the elements of the war economies in peace time will be a huge task for the authorities.

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